

Message Text

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TAGS: IAEA, PARM, TECH

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON IAEA SAFEGUARDS

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF WP ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED JANUARY 17
ENTITLED "NRC, SAFETY EXPERTS SPLIT ON INTERNATIONAL SAFE-
GUARDS" BY J.P. SMITH. PRESS GUIDANCE FOLLOWS IN PARA.16.

1. THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION HAS BEEN LICENSING
EXPORTS OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF ITS
SAFETY EXPERTS WHO SAY THAT EXISTING INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS
GOVERNING THE USE OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS ARE TOO WEAK.

2. SINCE SEPTEMBER, NRC'S OFFICE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL SAFETY
AND SAFEGUARDS HAS NOT GIVEN AN UNEQUIVOCAL "CONCURRENCE"
IN NRC'S EXPORT LICENSES BECAUSE OF A CLASSIFIED INTERNA-
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TIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY REPORT THAT IAEA SAFEGUARDS ARE
FAULTY.

3. SAFEGUARDS OFFICIALS AT THE NRC ALSO SAY THEY CANNOT
GIVE APPROVAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NRC BECAUSE THEIR INFOR-
MATION ON IAEA SAFEGUARD PROGRAMS IS INSUFFICIENT.

4. AT AN NRC MEETING LAST WEEK, DR. CLIFFORD V. SMITH SAID HIS OFFICE COULD NOT CERTIFY THE ADEQUACY OF SAFEGUARDS AND ACCOUNTING FOR MATERIAL THAT COULD BE DIVERTED TO FABRICATE WEAPONS. "WE CAN'T GIVE THAT BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE THE INFORMATION UPON WHICH TO BASE THAT," SAID SMITH, WHO HEADS THE OFFICE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDS.

5. "I WANTED THE COMMISSION TO UNDERSTAND THAT MY OFFICE IS NOT IN A POSITION TO GIVE A CONCURRENCE THAT IAEA SAFEGUARDS ARE ADEQUATE," SMITH SAID.

6. UNDER CURRENT PROCEDURES THE NRC REVIEWS ALL NUCLEAR EXPORT LICENSES. WHILE THE NRC IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO CHECK PHYSICAL SECURITY TO PREVENT TERRORIST ACTIVITY AT NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS ABROAD RECEIVING U.S. EXPORTS, THE VIENNA-BASED IAEA, NOT THE NRC, OVERSEES THE SAFEGUARDS. THIS CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF ACCOUNTING FOR NUCLEAR MATERIAL AND PROVIDING A TIMELY WARNING IF A COUNTRY TRIES TO CHANNEL PEACEFUL MATERIALS TO MAKE ATOMIC WEAPONS.

7. LAST YEAR THE IAEA PREPARED A STUDY CALLED THE "SPECIAL SAFEGUARDS IMPLEMENTATION REPORT" THAT WAS CRITICAL OF ITS OWN OPERATIONS. THE 41-PAGE REPORT HAS NOT BEEN MADE PUBLIC BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION.

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8. THE IAEA REPORT SAID THAT ORGANIZATION DID NOT HAVE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF INSPECTORS, AND THAT IAEA INSPECTIONS OF FIVE COUNTRIES FOUND ADEQUATE ACCOUNTING FOR NUCLEAR MATERIALS IN ONLY ONE. THE COUNTRIES WERE NOT NAMED.

9. DETAILS OF THE IAEA STUDY WERE PUBLISHED IN THE PRESS LAST NOVEMBER.

10. AN ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL SAYS THE IAEA PAPER "IDENTIFIES PROBLEMS BUT NOT THE COUNTRIES; WE COULD BE APPROVING EXPORTS TO IAEA COUNTRIES THAT ARE NOT MEETING SAFEGUARDS."

11. ANOTHER ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE IAEA REPORT IS ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S EFFORTS TO FORGE AN INTERNATIONAL NONPROLIFERATION POLICY TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. IN THE MEANTIME, THE ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN USING THE IAEA REPORT "AS A MEANS OF UPGRADING SAFEGUARDS," ONE OFFICIAL SAID. PUBLICIZING THE REPORT, SOME OFFICIALS SAY, COULD JEOPARDIZE NONPROLIFERATION LEGISLATION BEFORE CONGRESS.

12. IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, SMITH SAID THAT HE RE-EXAMINED HIS OFFICE'S POLICY ON "CONCURRING" WITH NUCLEAR EXPORT DECISIONS ON THE QUESTION OF SAFEGUARDS. INITIALLY THE NRC SAFEGUARDS EXPERTS CONCURRED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO EXPORT MATERIALS IF THE COUNTRY WAS AN IAEA MEMBER.

13. "BUT WHEN THE SSIR REPORT (SPECIAL SAFEGUARDS IMPLEMENTATION REPORT) CAME OUT, WHICH ITSELF SAID THAT THEY HAVE REAL PROBLEMS, WE COULDN'T CONCUR ON THE SAFEGUARDS PROBLEM." SMITH SAID. HE ADDED, "I WANTED TO MAKE IT CLEAR WHAT THE STAFF COULD AND COULD NOT DO."

14. SMITH AND OTHER NRC OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, STRESSED THAT UNCLASSIFIED

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THE NRC COMMISSIONERS WHO PASS ON NUCLEAR EXPORT LICENSES HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION FROM THE STATE AND ENERGY DEPARTMENTS, INCLUDING INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT ARE NOT SUPPLIED TO HIS OFFICE.

15. ELSEWHERE, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID THAT SMITH'S POSITION RAISES A LOT OF QUESTIONS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE NRC. "THE ISSUE IS HIGHLY POLITICAL AND FEELINGS ARE RUNNING VERY HIGH," ONE OFFICIAL SAID. END ARTICLE TEXT.

16. QUESTION: DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THIS MORNING'S STORY IN THE WASHINGTON POST QUOTING NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION OFFICIALS AS SAYING THAT BASED ON A CONFIDENTIAL IAEA REPORT, EXISTING INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS GOVERNING THE USE OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS ARE TOO WEAK?

ANSWER: -- THE SPECIAL SAFEGUARDS IMPLEMENTATION REPORT (SSIR) WAS PREPARED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY TO CRITIQUE ITS OWN OPERATIONS DURING 1976. IT WAS INITIATED AS A RESULT OF THE DESIRE OF COUNTRIES IN THE AGENCY TO ENSURE THAT THE INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS SYSTEM WOULD BE AS EFFECTIVE AS POSSIBLE AND WILL BE PREPARED ON AN ANNUAL BASIS. THE REPORT IS BEING USED BY THE AGENCY TO EFFECTIVELY FOCUS ITS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN SAFEGUARDS. IN SUPPORT OF THESE EFFORTS THE U.S. HAS INCREASED ITS VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IAEA FOR THIS PROGRAM BY SEVERAL MILLION DOLLARS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS.

--I WOULD POINT OUT THAT THE REPORT, WHILE NOTING A NUMBER OF EXISTING DEFICIENCIES, STATED THAT THE IAEA WAS CONFIDENT THAT IN NONE OF THE 41 STATES IN WHICH INSPECTIONS WERE CARRIED OUT WAS THERE ANY DIVERSION OF ANY SIGNIFICANT QUANTITY OF SAFEGUARDED NUCLEAR MATERIAL.
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--THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS LIES WITH THE IAEA AND IS THE BASIS OF INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR COOPERATION. THE APPLICATION OF SAFEGUARDS IS AN EVOLVING PROCESS, AND THE SSIR CLEARLY SHOWS THAT THE IAEA HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN THIS AREA. AS A MEMBER STATE, THE UNITED STATES SUPPORTS EFFORTS BY THE IAEA TO CORRECT NOTED DEFICIENCIES IN ITS SAFEGUARDS OPERATIONS AND TO CONTINUALLY SEEK IMPROVEMENTS IN ORDER TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGIES. CHRISTOPHER

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